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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

SHORT STORY TRANSLATED FROM BENGALI BY SANJUKTA DASGUPTA, HISTORICAL

Ketaki Kushari Dyson

SHORT STORY

TRANSLATED FROM BENGALI BY SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

A long time ago you once came over to our house. Shy youth, wearing a shirt over pajamas, you sat on our low divan talking to my father – inevitably about mathematics.

I was then twelve or thirteen. My hair was done in two plaits on either side. As I was growing rather rapidly, I used to wear a cheap bra under my cotton printed frock bought from the hawkers' stalls of Deshapriya Park. If my eyes met those of a young man's, I would instantly lower mine.

My mother had sliced some mangoes for you. The plate of mangoes in one hand, a glass of water in the other, I was entering the drawing room with shy, faltering steps. As I tried to shoulder away the door's heavy curtain, water spilled onto the plate of mangoes.

I returned to the kitchen. Carefully transferring the mango slices to another plate, my mother said, 'You just can't do any job properly, can you? Leave it, I'll take it myself.'

I went to the bedroom and had a good cry, my face buried in the pillow. Not from my mother's scolding, from the pain of not being able to reach you the mango plate properly.

Since then I haven't been able to do any job properly.

KETAKI KUSHARI DYSON was born in Calcutta in 1940; and educated at Presidency College, Calcutta, and St. Hilda's College, Oxford. A poet, playwright, translator and critic, she writes in both English and Bengali; and has published three collections of poems in Bengali and three in English. Myth, ethnic allusions, contemporary issues and realpolitik are fused with admirable ease in her poetry. She has been twice the recipient of the prestigious Bengali literary award, *Ananda Purush Kar*.

HISTORICAL

No: one can't satisfy everyone.
Look at Ram of Ayodhya,
Such a famous hero
In order to satisfy everyone
What a huge price he had to pay.

Not a filmstar
But a regular lifestar
His fans flourish even after so many centuries,
His name is uttered in goodwill greetings,
In songs that are sung
After yawns,
Also to deride others,
No exaggeration is it to call him star of India's almost-history.
In order to do his father proud,
And in order to please his father's formidable matted-hair pals
He subdued their class enemies, the ritual-hindering Rakshaks.
(Hopefully this modern definition will be pleasing to some).
In order to scrub the paternal family's plaque of fame
Till it might shine like a mirror
He won a girl-bride by breaking a double sized bow
Of another aristocratic family
(class-friendly).

Then in order to please his stepmother
(Victimized by harem politics)
Abandoning his kingdom he roamed the forests for fourteen years,
No relief in escapism either,
In order to please his child-wife
Rushed after an illusory animal
Lost his wife
(ancient kidnapping)

By rescuing his captive wife
 He of course raised his shirt-collar –
 But for that he endured problems galore –
 A bridge had to be built over the sea,
 He had to tame teams of monkeys,
 In order to earn Sugrib's support
 He had to make Bali his enemy
 Et cetera, et cetera,
 Politics, diplomacy, violent warfare.

Then again in order to appease
 The male chauvinistic urges of a patriarchal society and self,
 Even after regaining such a beloved wife
 He made her go through the raging flames.
 Even then he had no peace.

At last
 For the entertainment
 Of the treacherous masses.
 On a false pretext
 He turned his pregnant wife
 Out of the house.

Ram – mythic king in the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana*. Ram is revered as God by sections of the Hindu community.

Sugrib and Bali – mythic rival monkey kings in the *Ramayana*.